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AUTHOR Jones, McKinley A.
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ABSTRACT

An excerpt from a dissertation, this paper reflects the major aspects of a study of the relationship between black consciousness and political orientation. A major thesis of the study is that black consciousness shapes and orients the individual and is critical to the understanding of political socialization. Of particular interest to the study are the affective, cognitive, behavioral, and evaluative areas of orientation. A questionnaire was used to tap these orientations in the population of subjects at the seventh through twelfth-grade levels. The results of the study indicate that black consciousness correlates more with political variables than with any other factor. The statistics and a breakdown of the results are presented. A bibliography is included. (Author/BS)

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BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS

McKinley A. Jones, Ph.D.

Southern Illinois University

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS

The following paper is an excerpt from a dissertation submitted to the Sociology Dept. at the University of Illinois, Urbana. It is significant because it measures and predicts higher levels of political awareness of black youth as correlated with "black consciousness" (first presented by Cohen and Orum from data involving the same survey).

It has been suggested by popular, and academic scholars that blacks are stratified by their degree of identification or group consciousness. Popular terminology and jargon among blacks include "Tom", "oreo", "handkerchief head", "soul brother", "a for real brother", etc. These terms impute some expectation of both attitudes and behaviors related to blackness. We have chosen to label this identification as "black consciousness".

Racial and ethnic group identification or consciousness may be of greatest import to those minorities who have not been totally assimilated into the larger society. The significance of an Irish or German heritage may have little impact on their political orientations after being in America for a few generations. A degree of perceived assimilation may account for posturing or orientation toward the political system. Political issues may rarely be presented or perceived as special issues of ethnicity for those who think of themselves as members of dominant society first and ethnicity as merely a matter of ancestral lineage. Moreover, most members of the dominant society by definition have a mixed heritage which probably precludes response to political issues as singularly ethnic or racial.

While degree of assimilation or perceived assimilation and salience of issues as significant to an ethnic or racial group's position may possibly be sufficient to explain political orientation for most individuals, some minorities may have cultural as well as hisoric perspectives which have been transmitted and continue to emphasize a varied political orientation. The

re-emphasis of women's rights, women's liberation and the issue of the E.R.A. is an example of an issue of a political nature and significance which has persisted over time and has cultural roots. The aims of A.I.M. (American Indian Movement) is a similar example of a minority with continuing political social grievance which has varying degrees of salience or national attention. A common factor is the cultural basis for their political orientation over and above the peculiar nature of their individual concern. One may assume that the factor that separates the minority from the dominant society is the lack of power. It may be the acquisition of power, regardless to which end it is to be applied, i.e., assimilation, independence, autonomy, self-determinism or simply equality, which is the common goal of minorities. Due to different cultural and historic dictates each group may take different paths.

Blacks have employed different staategies at different periods and often during the same period. The one factor that persists while strategies may change is the awareness of group needs, an awareness we perceive to be correlated with group connectedness or "black consciousness". While agitation for political power and representation may vacillate and may often be due to the presence or threat of impinging issues, the consciousness which dictates action is of relevance in explaining how individuals perceive and respond to political stimuli.

Borrowing from Schwartz' (1973) Political Alienation and Political Behavior:

(1) the attitude of alienation is significanlly associated with the basic behavior orientations that men adopt toward the political system--conformity, reformism, ritualism, retreatism and rebelliousness;

(2) the process by which the attitude is adopted plus certain social background and personality variables predicts which of the basic behavioral orientations a given individual will adopt;

(3) the attitude of alienation and certain attitudes toward being alienated constitute a predisposition to seek political information from distinctive political reference groups (thereby allowing group and media stimuli to get through the individual's perceptual screen to activate his predispositions);

(4) groups, leaders and communications will be accepted by the alienated individual to the extent that these affect and/or manipulate the same variables that caused his alienation, TVC, PI and SI; [His TVC (perceived threat from value conflict), PI (perceived, personal, political inefficacy), and SI (perceived systemic inefficacy) are the basic factors in the equation of political alienation: TVC + PI + SI --- Political Alienation.]

(5) these group and communications stimuli, when perceived and accepted by the alienated individual, arouse and channel him into specific political behaviors.

Considering his aforementioned five points, substituting for "alienated" and "alienation", "black oriented" and "black orientation" and calling upon Bender's assessment of cultural relevance to political learning,

(a) that cultural tradition determines the lesson the parents will teach the child and the way in which the lessons are taught;

(b) that different cultures have different ways of training the child--and different lessons to teach;

(c) that the child's early experience exerts a lasting effect upon his personality; and

(d) that similar experiences will tend to produce similar personalities;

one has an approximate equation representing black political orientation.

The value conflict is generated by the self interest of those in the political system and their concern for the well being of black people,

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neither of which are always viewed as the same. "Law and order" is an example of a value which for many black people means further or increased persecution of black people. (The stopping and searching of blacks in San Francisco in an attempt to solve the Zebra Killings is a contemporary example of how law and order as a value translated into the denial of constitutionally guaranteed freedoms for black males. The intervention by police according to vague, general descriptions was viewed by most of the black community as a general disregard for the politically guaranteed rights of black people.) Political and systemic efficacy represents a relative ability to demand satisfactory, authoritative outputs from the political system and has not been reinforced culturally and historically for black people. From this perspective is derived the corollary to Schwartz' theory of alienation with degree of black consciousness the overriding variable:

BC (TVC = PE + SE) --→ Black Political Orientation.

To be sure black consciousness will not predict all ensuing behavior, as individual predispositions and other external factors are intervening variables leading to ultimate action. Degree of black consciousness is predicted to be highly and positively correlated with certain political orientations. Black consciousness is deemed to be an important element in the value screen which selects, attends to and interprets the actions of the political system.

Earlier it was suggested that blacks recognize, label and classify according to black consciousness. An index eveloved through factor analysis which is used

to approximate the elements of black consciousness. The items and their factor loadings are:

Q. 114. For the black, equality and integration are not the same things. (.44)

Q. 119. The "Afro" or "natural" hairstyle is dignified. (.52)

Q. 120. Black officials have a duty to be honest and should be more protective of the black community. (.55)

Q. 129. Many police departments are trying to wipe out militant black organizations and their leaders. (.50)

The items were taken from a forty item scale designed to elicit a sense of black consciousness (Banks, 1970), while the resulting four items scale was produced by factor analysis of thirty-six related items. It should be noted that these four items with a range of 3.48 to 13.92 were the first factor of seven for black children while for white children they did not factor together but were spread over four of the seven factors. That these items did not have the same meaning for blacks and whites is not sufficient to conclude that it represents a continuum of black consciousness; it is necessary that they have significantly different meaning. We are concerned that this exploratory scale does in fact discriminate. First, an examination of the items to derive possible interpretations.

Item 114 should tap a sensitivity for group pride that says dispersement among or proximity to whites is neither necessary nor sufficient to produce or maintain parity. It also connotes strong in-group cohesion with a large degree of acceptance of autonomy and independence. Referring to Dawson and Prewitt "children learn, early and fervently, that there are significant groupings in society and that some groups are friends and others, their enemies" as an extended interpretation of how deeply our

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respondents may feel about integration. Joan Laurence illuminates the issue of integration: "the black child's position as a black in this society gives him a different reality and a different self interest, even if he attends an integrated school."

Item 119 casts the "Afro" into a cultural perspective of pride and culture. As an expression of positive identity, referring to Erickson (1959), "...the need for identity is experienced as a need for a certain wholeness in the experience of oneself with the community..." One may easily forget that "length of hair" was once an issue of concern, either in terms of neatness or radicalism. Some blacks were hesitant to express a degree of identity through this, their new symbol of pan-Africanism, and the issue of dignity goes further than simple identification. Dignity speaks to more than flash-in-the-pan faddish kinds of symbolism or identification but legitimates, more so than the Afro, the idea of symbolic identification.

We felt that blacks feeling the intransigence of the federal government might focus on the local community, where corruption may be more visible. Our interest in community and the sense of group interest as aspects of black consciousness encourages us to suspect that blacks feel a need for change, at least from corruptive forces.

We suspected that blacks would perceive black officials as duty-bound to be more alert and diligent in providing the community with legitimate disbursements addressed to their needs. The idealistic emphasis of honesty notwithstanding, the item elicits a concern that these officials be more protective and concerned. As "black" issues are popularly understood, black voting and mobilization increase with the perception of racial issues.

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Perception of racial issues is underlined in Item 129 with the statement that there are police department conspiracies to wipe out militant blacks. Depending on one's view of militancy and referring to our reassessment of Schwartz' analysis, this item specifically points to value conflicts of specific concern to blacks. Of course, the idea of police conspiracies to "wipe out" anyone should produce value conflict in the American ideal of Democracy; but, considering this was pre-Watergate, it underlines the basic systemic distrust by blacks prior to its salience for other Americans. This systemic distrust may be understood as a cultural-historic dictate; which, for blacks, means the polity has been capable of all types of injustice. Even the definition of militant has had different connotations for blacks and whites when applied to blacks. Mild "agitation" for civil rights and liberties caused many to label blacks, e.g., N.A.A.C.P., Martin Luther King, Jr., as militant with the popular inference of destructive anarchism. Potentially these differences in definition serve as value constraints on behavior not desired by groups in power (Dahrendorf; Henderson; Sizemore; Yankelovich and Barrett). They may indeed serve as constraints to certain political orientations.

Political Orientations

Our concern with black consciousness is its relationship to perceptions of the polity, that is, that it shapes and orients the individual. This aspect, orientation, is critical to the understanding of political socialization. The areas of orientation, for our purposes, are (1) affective (feelings, attitudes), (2) cognitive (information, knowledge), (3) behavioral

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(discussion, participation) and (4) evaluative (discrimination, norms, values). Generally investigators approach and discern these areas as progressing in the aforementioned order. Most notably Hess and Torney express this view and present the school as the major agent in transmitting these orientations. Understandably the school is the setting where most attention to the political system is concentrated and serves to focus and select. Further discussion of the agents is reserved for later.

It should be noted that throughout, our design is to maintain the definition of political socialization as "those developmental processes through which persons acquire political orientations and patterns of behavior" (Easton and Dennis, 1965 a: 7). We prefer this definition rather than a reinforcing evaluation of what the system encourages for its maintenance and persistence. The attempt is to avoid both interpretive and methodological problems which become endemic in surveying school children.

Emergence or stages of development of these areas appears to follow a logical and temporal order but we prefer not to consider them chronologically. Affect is simply the degree of attachment or predisposition toward the system and symbols. Cognition is interpreted as knowledge and information about the system while assessment of behavior concerns traditional extracurricular activities plus school participation. Lastly, by evaluation we are more concerned with discriminatory attitudes than investment of values and norms.

Analysis of the areas of orientation, as stated earlier and especially for older children and adults, are often more continuous than discrete, that is, the evaluative and affective merge, consciously or unconsciously.

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Unfortunately the questionnaire attempted to tap these orientations for grades 4 through 12 and only grades 7 through 12 completed the section containing the black consciousness questions. Responses for the earlier age group which were considered affective are considered as evaluative for older students, with the assumption that like-or-dislike becomes more a matter of reasoning with maturity.

Affective

One measure of affect is attachment or feeling about the system and its symbols. People and symbols of the country and nation are the first recognizable objects of a child's attention with the President and the flag being most notable (Hess and Torney). We chose as areas of investigation of affect: image of President, politicians and police; government benevolence; cynicism; and American ethnocentrism.

For younger children, Hess and Torney (26) relate the extremely positive attachment to the flag and symbols of the nation, although they possess only a rudimentary understanding of the underlying intricacies these symbols represent. Most children have an either-or, simplistic view of life and their extreme positiveness is probably reflective of their vagueness and early in-group identification (Allport). "Our flag", "our President", "my country" is largely explained by the psychodynamics of early childhood learning. We should expect children to be positive, but for black children we predict the more black conscious the less positive their attachment. There is an obvious limitation to the degree of negativism to be expected largely because of learning processes of children (Merelman) and the degree to which the polity is woven into the

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national culture (Devine), not overlooking the legalities of sedition and treason which could possibly threaten teachers. At best to be expected is a rejection of the positive or a selection of "issues" about which one can be negative, e.g., the Vietnam Conflict, "Watergate".

[Table 1]

The President, one of the earliest positive symbols of government identified by children, is in our survey the most negative representation. For our seventh through twelfth graders, those who score higher on black consciousness were negative. They are not only negative about the President but politicians in general with police falling between. The role and office of the President as chief of the nation is traditionally considered one of the most prestigious occupations; yet, as a political symbol, it is the most negative. In accord with the Kerner Report, the police rank second in negativity as a symbol. The Kerner Report stressed that during the riots of the sixties, police were more than a mere "spark" but actually represented, to the rioters, the political system. Ideologically or realistically, the police are more than servants of the people: they are part and parcel of the polity.

Interestingly enough, the general rubric of politicians, while negative, is least negative of the three. As a check on a general trend against authority figures we included questions about the positive image of fathers and teachers. There was no significant correlation between black consciousness and positive image of father but the relationship with the teacher's image suggests a slight trend of negativity toward authority figures.

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A trend of negativity toward authority figures may appear to weaken the impact of black consciousness as a particular personality type but the strongest correlation of affect and any political variable we tapped was the level of cynicism. Black consciousness and cynicism present an imposing factor that these individuals are indeed negative about the political system. Not only are they cynical about the government addressing itself to the needs of the people, they believe more strongly that the government can and should be benevolent. The degree of belief in the government's ability to help the people (0.1352) is practically equal to their negative image of police (-0.1369). They appear to believe in the capacity of the government to intervene in their behalf yet they are cynical about the possibility.

As we expected, even black consciousness would not be signficantly correlated with American ethnocentrism. "America is the best country" is a concept that persists and prevails and is not as easily affected as other political variables. The childhood belief system and the political culture seem to maintain a degree of stability in the face of other types of intervention. Cynicism about government, negativity about the President, police, and politicians may exist, yet even those higher black conscious respondents were not stimulated to be negative about the nation.

Cognitive

Our major source for knowledge about the political system is taken from questions designed to tap just that--basic political knowledge. The scale for political knowledge contained items which additionally tapped information about blacks who have figured prominently in the black

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community and represents a three item scale of black knowledge. We anticipated that those higher on black consciousness would be higher on black knowledge and additionally, political knowledge. As we suggested earlier a major concern of black awareness is invested in the political arena. Therefore, those of higher concern and awareness would be more attentive to the machinations of government. We felt there would be a strong link between the concern for the black community and the procedures of the polity for disseminating or withholding its rewards.

[Table 2]

The correlation between the variables black knowledge and black consciousness is fairly strong, as hoped, ranking second only to the measure of affect-cynicism. We employed gamma to give direction and feel safe in assuming that identification with the black community precedes and then attends to information about blacks. Studies about race and attitude change generally assume that contact and information will have an impact, but also imply that a predisposition leads one to select information consonant with existing belief patterns. Our respondents demonstrate a significantly higher correlation with black knowledge and political knowledge. Since the total number of items (9) in the latter is three times the constituent black knowledge items, it also appears safe to assume that it is not merely a result of correct responses to the black items. Moreover, even if the black items (mean = 1.26) had contributed wholly to political items (mean = 4.28) it is reasonable to propose that "black" information is, especially for those blacks of higher identification,

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information. That is, information about or for blacks should be considered equally retainable and significant as any other kind of data.

The variables, perception of power and knowledge of authorities, could be considered equally under affective or evaluative but since they involve knowledge of the limitations and expectations of authorities, they are included here. Neither are statistically significant nor do they present worthwhile correlations. An interesting point may be the negative perception of power of authorities, with interpretation being purely conjectural.

Behavioral

The concern with political behavior in youth is obviously the prediction of adult behavior. It focuses on two beliefs about political socialization: the accumulation model, the view that role expectations proceed by acquisition of units of knowledge, attitudes, activities, etc., and the identification model, imitation of significant others. One would expect that early encounters with politics and political roles would predispose an individual to other future activity. The limited nature of our study did not allow us to tap the myriad of experiences that would be transferable to the political world. Our variables attempted to tap direct involvement with issues and activities of a political nature; but, an apparent limitation is a combination of age, accessibility and occurrence of the activities.

[Table 3]

An interesting note when assessing the lack of a high correlation or significance of active participation due to black consciousness is that black children are more politically active than whites (Cohen and

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Orum). It is quite probably the higher relative degree of participation that negates the influence of black consciousness on this variable. Alternately there is a significant correlation with political discussion that may mean these respondents are equally active yet have a greater investment in their activity. Their higher level of discussion is one aspect which would predict a greater future involvement.

Evaluative

Traditionally the evaluative orientation area is viewed as an investment of norms and values into the political system; but, in addition it is here a perception of party differences. We are not only interested in what respondents believe ought to occur, but whether they perceive any difference in the disbursements of authoritative outputs by the polity.

Our first variable is degree of partisanship, that is, not merely whether they are pro-Democrat, Republican or independents, but whether they discern any distinction between parties or issues.

[Table 4]

The statistics demonstrate little significance and little correlation between black consciousness and partisanship. The negative sign shows a tendency toward independence while the mean (21.67) and standard deviation (11.230) suggests that our respondents are pro-Democrats or independents (the scoring is Republican -1, Democrat -2, "About the Same" -3). Most popular opinion polls bear out our data that blacks have traditionally voted and been in favor of Democrats; which, if the high correlation between parent-child party choice persists, is to be expected. The higher

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degree of independence among our respondents suggests that they are more concerned with issues and individuals than with party allegiance.

"Voting, as the only thing to do about government" has a low significance and correlation; but, here too, the sign designates a tendency to view other means for producing political ends. These are the same respondents who are equally active as their less conscious counterparts; and, behaviorally or ideologically, they perceive other ways to sway the government. The overall tendency for our high B.C. respondents suggests that voting is not their exclusive alternative.

While they do not view voting as all inclusive, they demonstrate a lack of a sense of political efficacy. The higher the degree of black consciousness, the less they feel that they, themselves, will be in a position to make changes. "Laws are difficult to change" and "I won't be an important person in government" seems to carry the most weight in their evaluation.

While our respondents have a sense of ineffectiveness, there also exists a high correlation between black consciousness and the negative of the variable political trust-equal treatment under the law. The weights, factor loadings, for the items suggests where they view the greatest inequities: Wealth (.79), age (.75), race (.72) and police (.46). That is, they perceive that the system does not treat everyone equally and are equally emphatic about the determining factors of wealth, age, and race. That the police have less emphasis suggests that blacks are sophisticated enough to discern a more systematic discrimination. That is, individual policemen are not viewed as having as much weight in the dispensation of justice with its assigned inequities as are sociological

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factors in general. To echo Greenberg, black children, in comparison with white, appear to be much more realistic and sophisticated in their assessment of the legal system. In the face of overwhelming information, it is unreasonably idealistic to perceive American justice as truly blind and to this point, the more highly black conscious, with their greater degree of disagreement, must be even more realistic.

Our final evaluative variable concerns what our respondents feel is the role of government relative to the economy. A general, basal interpretation of this variable is the effects on the standard of living. There is a positive and significant correlation that suggests that the higher black conscious respondents are in favor of government control of income distribution. In light of the lack of trust and the heavy degree of emphasis on big business, it appears that there is a concern about the role of wealth in government. "It would be better for all if government controlled business instead of vice-versa" seems to be the statement and is reinforced by the lack of faith in equal treatment under the law due to wealth. Inspection shows that evaluative areas are the more strongly correlated items, since our cynicism is more evaluative than merely tapping feeling levels. Distrust of the Government and of its mechanisms for justly distributing its authoritative outputs appears to be the prevalent concern for those more highly connected with the black community. Returning to Schwartz, we see that indeed there exists a greater degree of SI, systemic inefficacy and PI, personal, political inefficacy. Our high B.C. respondents tend to make or respond to negative statements about the system and its symbols. They do not seem to be assured that they will be in position to make the changes they deem necessary.

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By and large, the polity does not appear to be perceived as working for them.

The area of TVC, threat of value conflict, is not as clearly present because our instrument did not directly pursue it. Our high B.C. respondents are positive in their perception of the ability of the government to be helpful and benevolent. They are more active both in discussion and participation. There should be a degree of conflict because their participation (by their loadings) suggests a greater emphasis on traditional types of behavior; handing out papers or buttons (.79), wearing campaign buttons (.66) and demonstrating (.54); but no more conflict than their less conscious brothers. The higher relationship with discussion, which is more strongly weighted "with parents", would imply that they carry the normal amount of value conflict or expectations for blacks.

It appears a safe assumption or assertion that those respondents who are higher in black consciousness are relatively more critical in their assessment of the political world. A trend toward a negative valence in their regards of the government demonstrates a greater degree of sophistication than their less conscious counterparts and the white population to which they are usually compared. It is extremely idealistic to expect blacks to uncritically approach the government as though it were equally benign towards them. In light of current political events, it is additionally intriguing that these seventh through twelfth graders (interviewed in 1970-71) displayed their negative orientation yet maintained a higher level of participation. In face of the shock registered by respondents to current public opinion polls (in the wake of Watergate

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coverup exclosure and Nixon's resignation) and a sense of resignation and withdrawal of whites, in general, and white youth, it is intriguing to conjecture on the impact and future patterns of orientation for our high B.C. respondents. Since they had expected the kinds of maneuvering recently exposed, one can expect that they did not suffer as much value conflict and will not retreat. What may have been considered negative in 1970 appears to be idealistic in the latter seventies and one can expect that our respondents will become relatively more active and have an even greater impact.

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Additionally, and even more intriguing is that black consciousness scale correlated more highly with the political variables than any other single factor. The following zero-order coorelations for 110 respondents (for whom we have a full set of responses on each variable) domonstrates that our index was significant on more variables, 10 out of 15, and was higher than any other varaible in (sex, grade, big and most decisicns, father's and mother's occupation, and, father's and mother's education) seven items.

	Sex	Grade	Age	B.D.+	M.D.+	B.C.
Par	-----	-----	-----	-.237**	-.202*	-----
Cyn	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	.277***
Tru	-----	.148	.100	-----	-----	-.350***
Econ	-----	-----	-----	-.101	-----	.168**
Eff	-.12	-----	-----	-----	.155*	.16*
Auth	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	.253*
Pow	-----	.106	.103	-----	.158*	-----
Poli	-.252**	.184*	.239**	-----	-----	-----
Pres	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-.218*
Cops	-.119	.141	.150	.120	.158*	-.22**
Pcip	-.131	-----	.129	-----	-----	.155*
Vote	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Bene	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	.243**
Disc	-----	-.152	-.151	.124	.110	.125
B.C.	-----	.225**	.105	-----	-----	-----

	FAOCC	MOOCC	FAED	MOED
Par	-----	-----	-----	-----
Cyn	-----	-----	-----	-----
Trust	-.152	-.117	.143	.263**
Econ	-----	.140	-----	-----
Eff	-----	-----	-----	-----
Auth	-----	-----	-.255**	-.250**
Pow	-.182*	-.117	-----	-.145
Poli	-----	-----	-----	-----
zres	-.107	-.196*	.178*	.244**
Cops	-.14	-----	-----	.118
Pcip	-----	-----	-----	-.105
Vote	-----	-----	.137	-----
Bene	-----	.127	-----	-----
Disc	-----	-----	.136	-----
B.C.	-----	-----	-----	-----

Sex is scored 0 female, 1 male

Who makes the big/most decisions in your house?
my father 1
my mother 2
both ... 3

Absence of * .1 = p = .05
* .05 = p = .01
** .01 = p = .001
*** p = .001

TABLE 1

Black Consciousness
with Political Variables of Affect

	r	p
Level of Cynicism	.2930	.001
Positive Image of President	-.1757	.001
Positive Image of Police	-.1369	.001
Positive Image of Politicians	-.1091	.003
Government Benevolence	.1352	.001
American Ethnocentrism	.0322	.209
Positive Image of Teacher	-.0945	.007
Positive Image of Father	.0267	.249

TABLE 2

B.C. with Cognitive Political Variables

	r	p
Black Knowledge*	.2699	.001
Normal Political Knowledge	.243	.001
Perception of Power of Authorities	-.0149	.36
Perception of Knowledge of Authorities	.498	.118

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TABLE 3

B.C. with Behavioral Political Variables

	r	p
Active Participation in Politics	.0097	.403
Participation through Discussion in Politics	.1344	.001

TABLE 4

B.C. with Evaluative Political Variables

	r	p
Partisanship	-.0421	.152
Voting, as the only thing to do about government	-.0362	.084
Political Trust-Pos Perception of equal treatment under the law	-.2588	.001
Political Efficacy	-.1442	.001
Economic Responsiveness	.1292	.001

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